

2010 Military Health System Conference

Military Suicide Prevention and Postvention ...from the Survivor's Perspective

Sharing Knowledge: Achieving Breakthrough Performance

COL George Patrin (and Fellow Survivors)

25 January 2010



Joint Task Force, Capital Medical Region (JTF CAPMED)

Military Suicide Prevention ...from the Survivor's Perspective



Disclaimer

The views and assertions contained herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Department of the Army, the JTF CAPMED, or the Department of Defense.

Military Suicide Prevention ...from the Survivor's Perspective



- Suicide prevention and risk reduction in military communities is discussed from the perspective of military families who have lost a loved one to suicide.
 - Discuss important lessons learned in suicide prevention from the perspective of families who have lost a service or family member due to suicide (save lives, reduce bereavement).
 - List at least three factors or conditions that indicate a young person is at high risk for committing suicide in a (military) community.

Andrew's Case



"Want to stay, can you catch me, 'cuz I'm going too fast?"



Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.

Plato

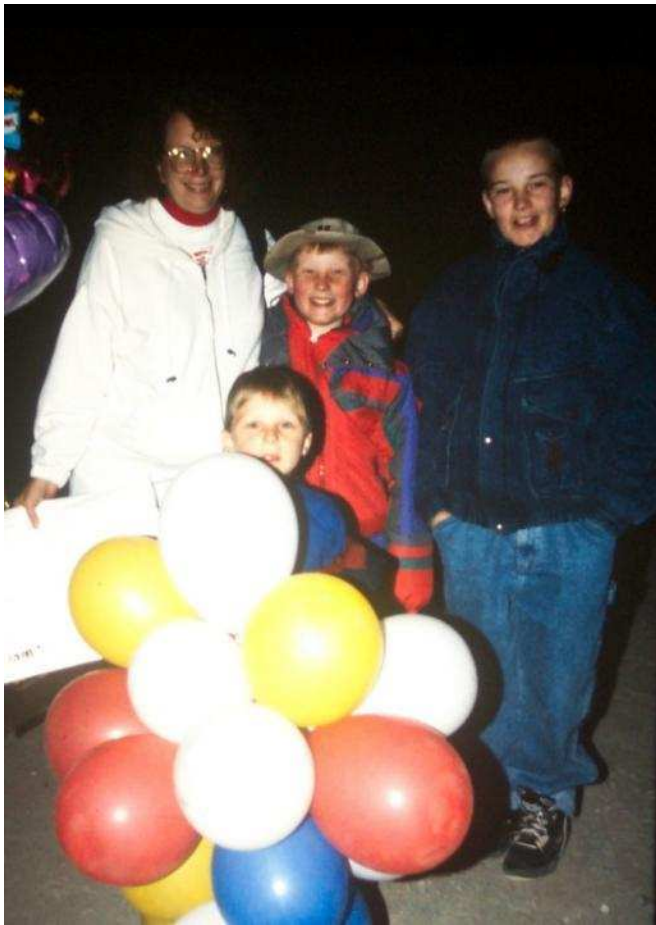
Andrew's Case



*A Life Lived
... from beginning to end*



Andrew's Case



*A Life Lived
... as an Army 'brat'*

Andrew's Case



*A Life Lived
... as a pre-teen*

Andrew's Case



A Life Lived

... as a teen

Andrew's Case



*A Life Lived
... in high school and "college"*

Andrew's Case



I'm an animal, and the animals are too.
We live on planet Earth
And here the sky is blue.
Grass is usually green
And children play under the sun.
Happiness is king
And the only law is fun."



*A Life Lived
... with a philosophy*

Andrew's Case



*A Life Lived
... as a young adult*

Andrew's Case



Andrew's Case



AmazingTexasTwisters.com...210.355.7852
Amazing Balloons*Face Painting
Costumes*Magic*Karaoke
Temporary Tattoos*Games
Giant Bubbles*Puppets
Hair/Nail Fashions*Science
Dress-up*Stories*Dance
Caricatures...AND MORE!
Ask for Andrew



A Life Lived

... as a Valued Employee and Co-Worker

Andrew's Case



ANDREW H. PATRIN

Philanthropist

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He tried to give Google or Yahoo his idea for a worldwide learning website that would provide a free college education regardless of socioeconomic status, capable of teaching at each learner's developmental level and pace.

He couldn't get an appointment.



*A Life Lived
... as a "Philanthropist"*



ANDREW PATRIN DEDICATION

by Nichole Ross, Pres., Permaculture Res Inst of USA



Andrew was a visionary, choosing to focus on solutions for the environmental problems on this planet. He wanted to make a positive change for the future, through smart civilization design, one that cares for the earth, rather than taking from it.

He was determined to study on his own until he could write and implement a new college curriculum on
“Civilization Re-Design.”

Even though a Mensa member, Berkeley, CA, turned him down.

Andrew – “The Considerate Suicide”

Last Words Written Tue, Apr 7, 2009



- I hope wildly like a brain-damaged optimist that (my) ideas... will change the world forever.
- I hope you like my last song.
- Sorry for the mess.
- Being human has got me down.

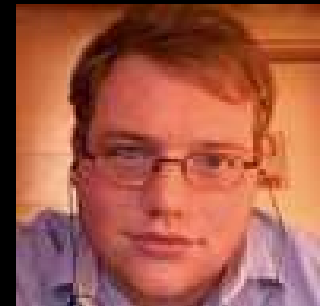


Best Friend Eulogy



“He had so much potential ... so much to offer.
He taught us how to learn something from everything.
We have to live on, because Andrew Patrin couldn't.”

Jonathan



Comments



“I think of him often and wonder how our society could do better in predicting and preventing the loss of vulnerable children and adolescents like Andrew .”

Roberta (Cousin)

“He couldn't see beyond the fog that robs all of your energy.”

Sabrina (Friend)

Moment of Silence



... for all who have been lost.

Suicide is on people's minds...



“The growing incidence of suicide of active military returning veterans is disturbing. Sometimes the deadliest wounds are the ones you cannot see, and we cannot afford to let the unseen wounds go untreated..”

President Barack Obama, 4/9/09

“If a soldier dies by suicide, some people think he wasn't killed by the enemy,.. But I always tell people that we can never know what they were going through or what kinds of things they were fighting.”

MAJ GEN Mark Graham, 3/28/09

Suicide is on people's minds...



The New York Times

U.S.

Fort Hood Struggles With Stressed Troops

6 of 14

SSG Garza and Mom



☒ SIGN IN TO RECOMMEND ☐ TWITTER ☐ SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

Teri Smith with a photo of her son, Staff Sgt. Justin Lee Garza, 28, who committed suicide in a friend's apartment outside Fort Hood. Sergeant Garza was told four days earlier that no therapists were available for a counseling session. "What bothers me most

PFC Parris and Mom



SPC TJ Sweet and Mom

"This is not business as usual.."

GEN Peter W. Chiarelli, VCSA, 27 April 2009

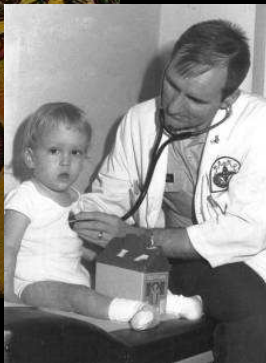
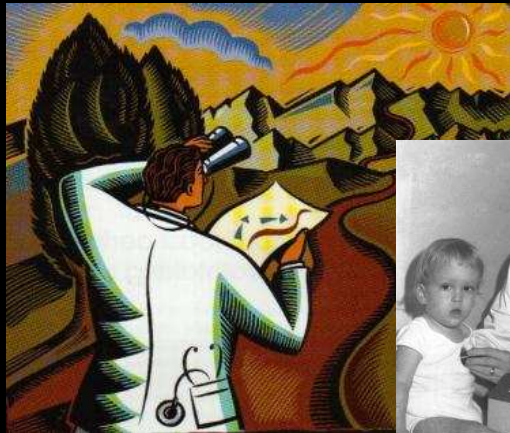
Statistics...



- 80-90 people will die of suicide today (vs 80 per year due to lightning)
- Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 25- to 44-year-olds in the United States
- Nearly seventeen percent of high school students had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.
U.S. CDC Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2008
- More than 30,000 people will have committed suicide this year, nearly twice the number of people who were murdered, yet we do relatively little to staunch this wound of society.

OBIT for Bipolar Patient, 6 January 2010

The Patrins – A “Military” Family



18 April 1987 to 7 April 2009



2010 MHS Conference



Military Suicide Prevention ...from the Survivor's Perspective

**Dr. George and Mrs. Pam Patrin
Father, Pediatrician, Administrator
Mother, Homemaker, Seamstress**

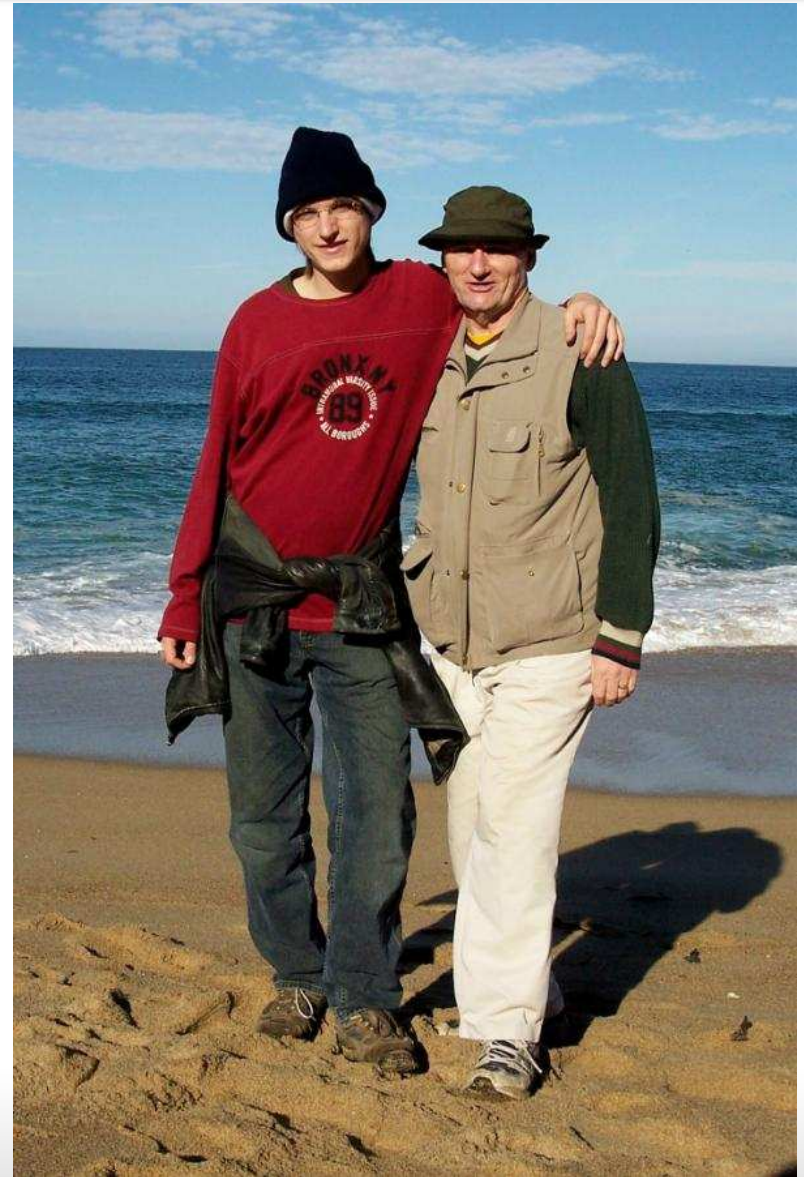
Assumptions (BLUF)

1. All participants in the care of Andrew were/ are well-meaning and would have done anything to help him.
2. If we don't conduct after action review we won't identify the next one we could help, prevent the next tragedy.
3. Full transparency is the only way we will truly change.

Dad's Statement



"It's hard not to be bitter... not with Andrew, but with the Community/ Medical System. My entire career has been one of advocacy for improved (optimized) healthcare. I must believe that Andrew's death could have been prevented. I will continue to challenge the "system" to improve, just as I did before Andrew's death."



Mom's Statement



“I miss my Andrew hugs. Leadership needs to talk about what went wrong, full transparency. And lessons learned need to be shared with other clinics. Why did they wait so long to do a depression screen and then not pay attention to the high score?”

Andrew's Story

The Intervention That Never Happened



23 March - Second appt in 3 months w/ 2nd FP for depression, suicidal thoughts, sent to pharmacy for new psych med, referred to "TRICARE" for routine mental health visit

3 Apr, Fri – Tells former girlfriend he will commit suicide, she alerts police who log "mental warrant" but do nothing, she goes home to parents

4 Apr, Sat – Calls friends detailing suicide plan, they believe "he'll show up"

5 Apr, Sun (0200) – Email to friends detailing suicide with will, 2nd "missing person report," insist that police look for him, weak APB sent to Nevada w/o car info

5 Apr, Sun - Stopped by security sleeping in car on private property with new shot gun & ammo in car, released after showing it's unloaded

6 Apr, Mon (1400) - Parents learn of plan from girlfriend's parents, alert CA PD who issue new report with car info obtained by brother

6 Apr, Mon (late PM) – Parents and CA PD call Sprint for location – "cannot give out info, get a court order"

7 Apr, 0300 - Andrew contacts family w/'last emails,' "I'm sorry," parents again contact PD and Sprint, plead for message origination, - "wait 'til business hours"

7 Apr, 1400 - Sprint concedes, locates Andrew within 50 ft...

too late, body and note found at 1338 in motel room with shotgun wound to the heart

Signs of Depression

(lasting two or more weeks)



- **Frequent sadness, tearfulness, crying**
- **Increased irritability, anger, or hostility**
- **Loss of interest in activities; unable to enjoy favorite activities**
- **Hopelessness**
- **Boredom; low energy**
- **Isolating, poor communication**
- **Low self-esteem and guilt**
- **Extreme sensitivity to rejection or failure**
- **Difficulty with relationships**
- **Frequent complaints of physical illness (headache/stomachache)**
- **Missing school or drop in grades**
- **Poor concentration**
- **Major change in eating and/or sleeping patterns**
- **Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior**

Source: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

Andrew's Last Visit Information (Facts) Available...



- ✓ History of 10 years of anxiety and tachycardia (cardiac negative, "stress" induced?)
- ✓ Stated that ADHD meds were increasing depression
- ✓ Depression screen (Becks) +15 (5 is 'positive')
- ✓ Prior visit in Dec 09 with same c/o (depression, suicidal thoughts) not better, but worse
- ✓ Healed cuts on both legs (physical exam not done as this was 'first visit' with this provider)
- ✓ Family Hx of multiple severe mental health diagnoses - depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, bulimia, alcoholism, autism
- ✓ Social Hx recent break-up with girlfriend, car theft, job dissatisfaction, lost court case

Why/ How Can This Happen?

- **Group Think/ Unit Behavior**
- **Attribution theory, Actor/Observer Bias**
- **Cognitive Dissonance**

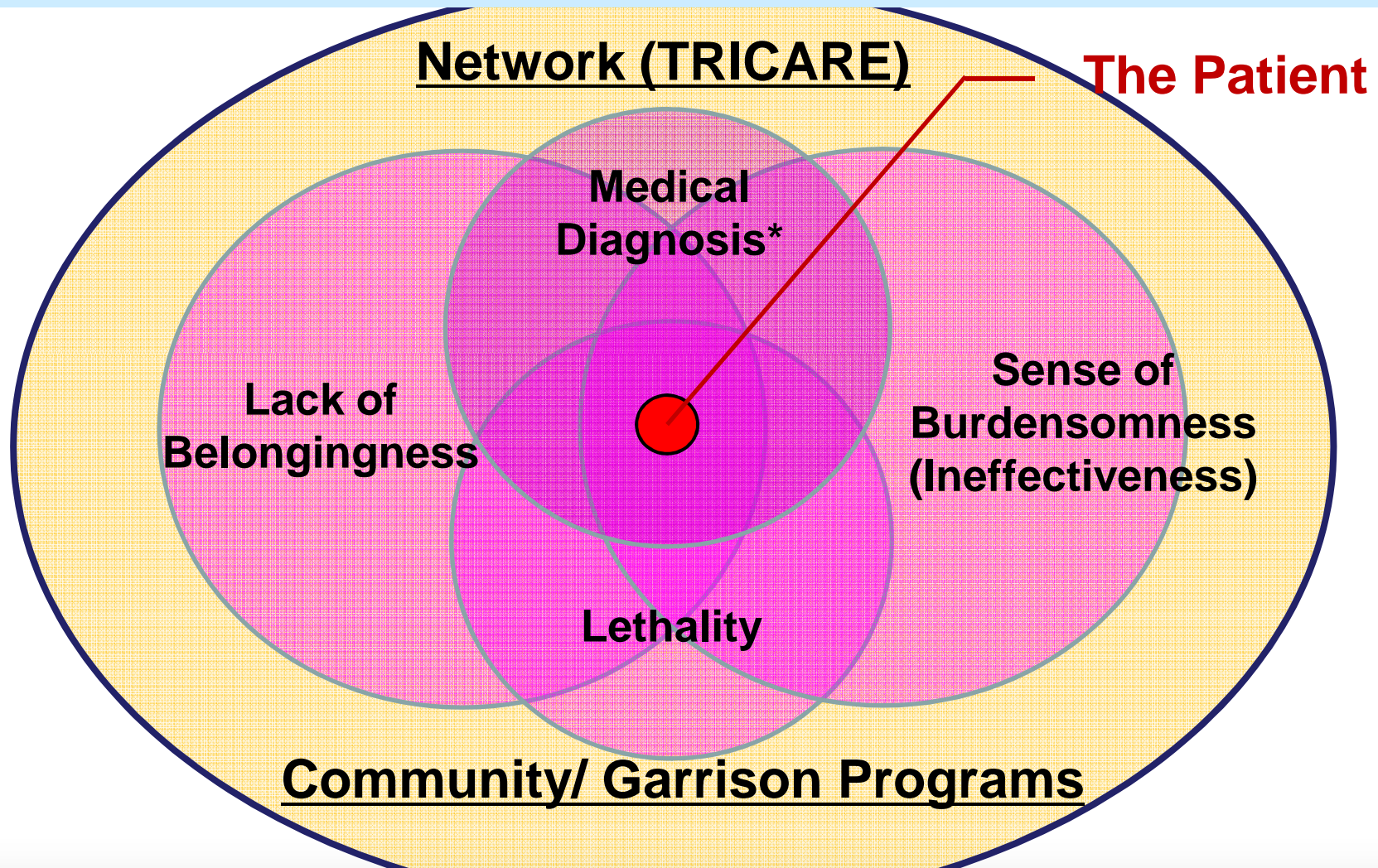
Always ask – **“Who’s the patient?”**
(especially when the issue is mental health)

Joiner Model



Adapted from: Joiner, T. (2005). WHY PEOPLE DIE BY SUICIDE. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press.

***Untreated depression = the leading cause of suicide...**



...but most depressed people don't attempt to take their lives.

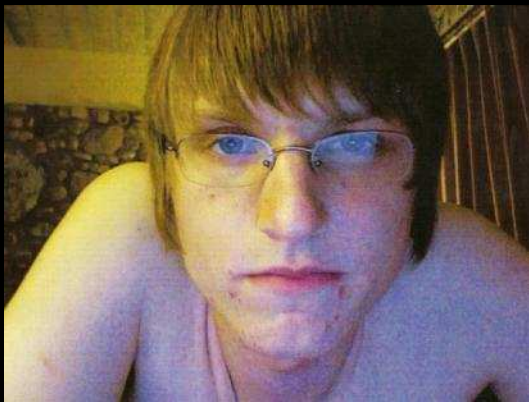
An Explanation

by Andrew - Tue, Apr 7, 2009



Written at 0300, 8 hours before he died...

- In order to survive, I need (at least one of) three things...



Last self-portrait, in hotel room

1. Being able to love.
2. A good life situation.
3. A sense of absolute truth (as engendered by a belief in God and similar things).

An Explanation

by Andrew - Tue, Apr 7, 2009



Written at 0300, 8 hours before he died...

- Love can conquer all... and fueled me to succeed (for a time)
- A fulfilling and relevant job... surrounded by peers interested in the same things ...can keep (you) going, even if (there's) no one to love at all.
- (I had the) potential to eventually bring the world great things...
- (But making them) happen...by my own efforts has yielded squat.
- (And I've found no) "non-human-defined truth."



Why/ How Can This Happen?

Dad's and Mom's, Troops Can't See It



"It's a defense mechanism. When something's frightening, like knowing your child's behaving in an unsafe way, you decide not to think about it. You tell yourself it'll be all right."



2010 MHS Conference

Susan and Dylan Klebold.
From O Mag, Nov 09

From Jeanne Blake

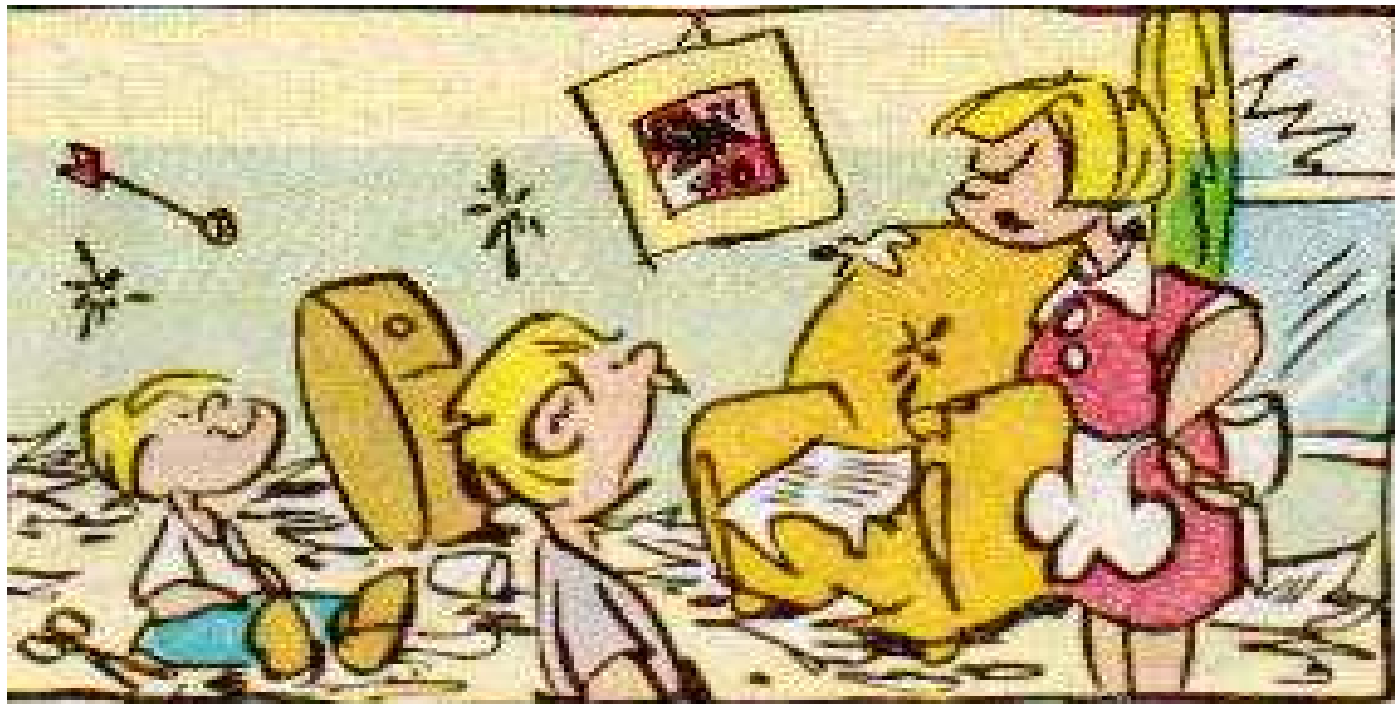
WORDS CAN WORK
Knowing the issues, talking with kids.

Dr. Brian Johnson

Director of Addiction Psychiatry

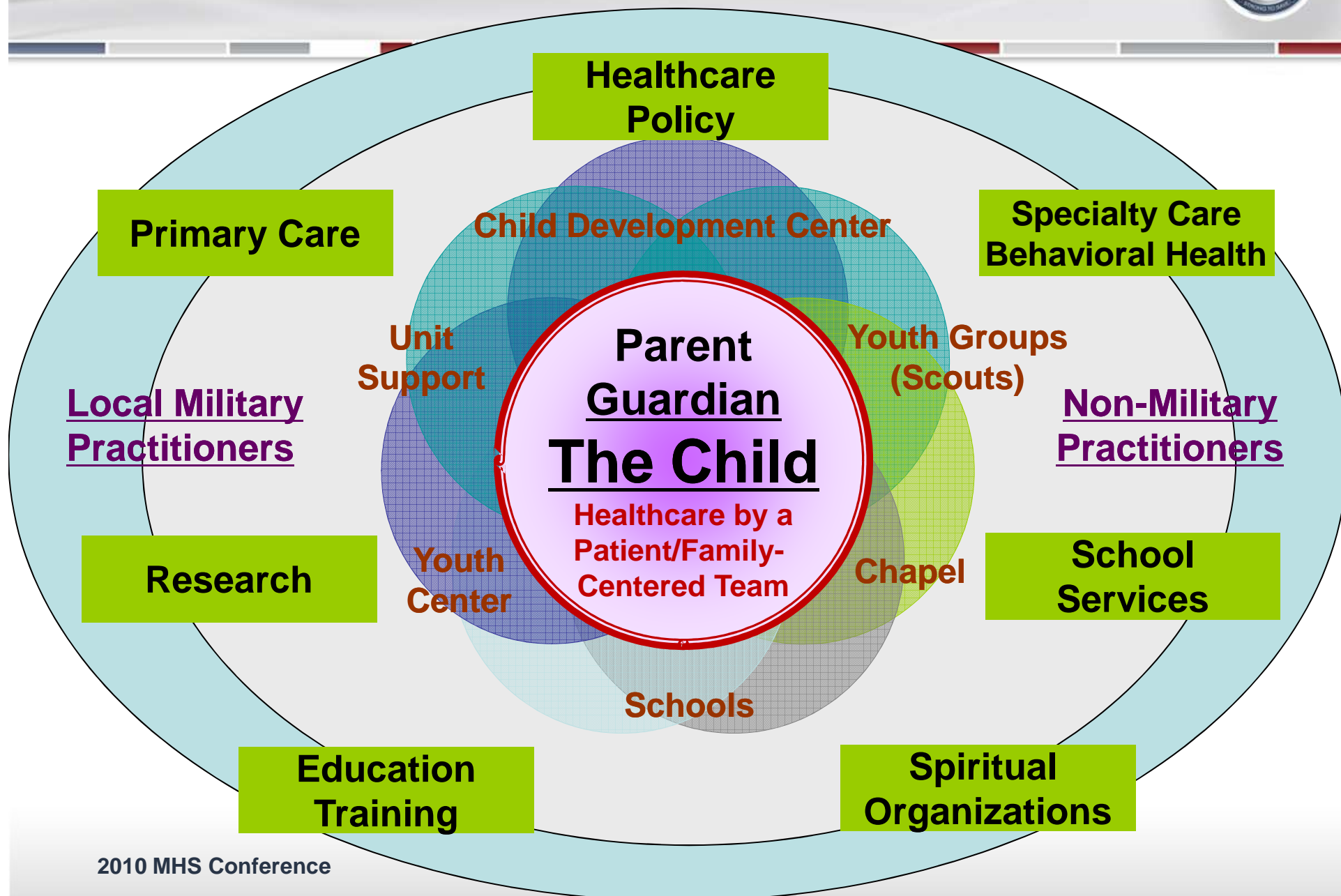
SUNY Upstate University

A Community Well-Being Program Is Needed

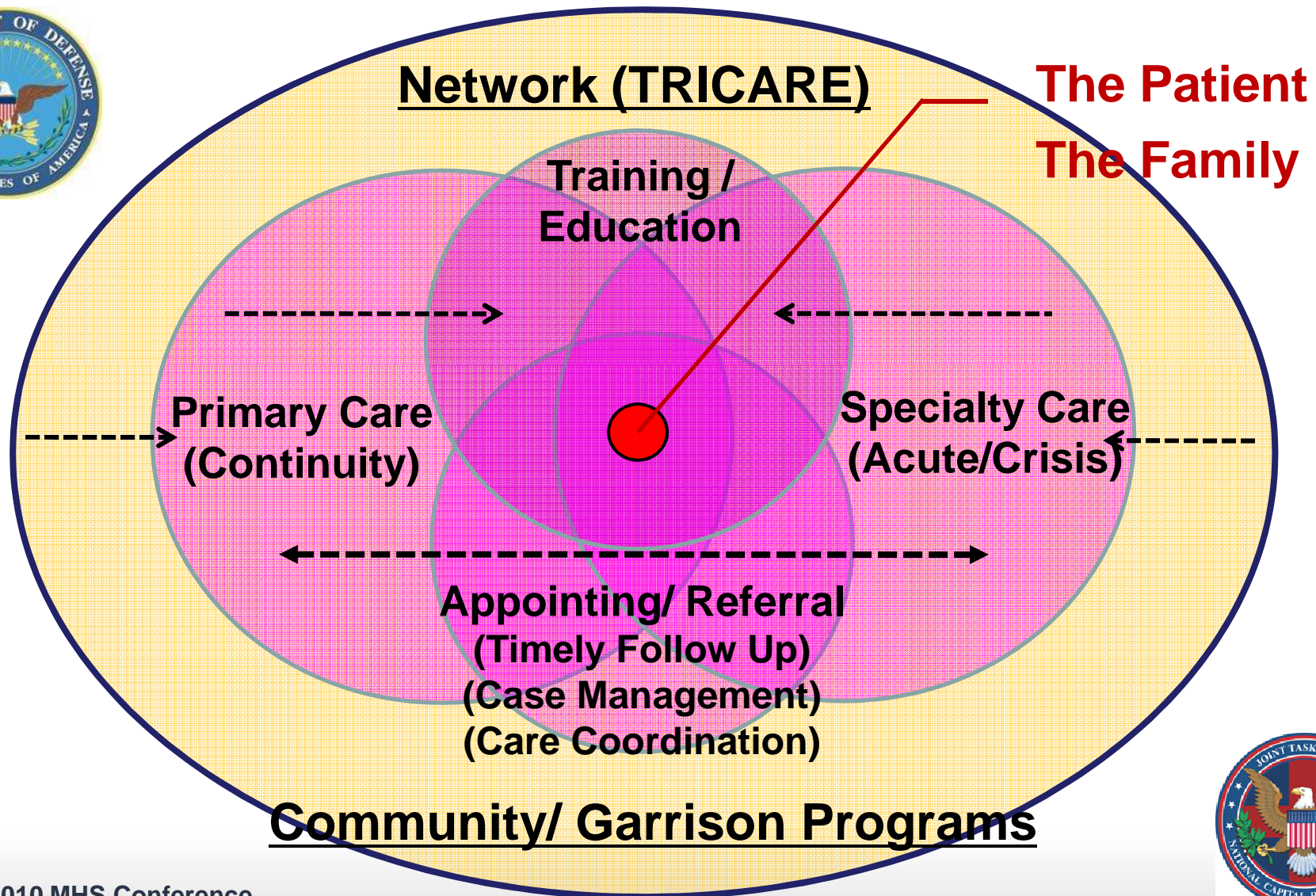


"Don't blame yourself, Mom. It takes a village to raise a child."

Community Collaborative Approach



A Community Strategy and Plan



Military Community-Wide Cultural Change Required



1. Optimize (Medical Home) Primary Care Teams with integrated case management, care coordination, 'on site' resources
2. Establish comprehensive administrative and medical services for Warriors and their Family Members
3. Support continuity with provider teams - stop incentivizing 'fee-for-service,' 'band-aid' visits
4. Include personal crisis referral resources to mental health for Family Members

Suggested Actions To Be Taken (1/3)

Treatment/ Resources



1. Take depression seriously – support timely, urgent, proactive referral to mental health with ANY suicidal talk
2. Provide intervention services for family members; enlist police and cell phone company support (see Brandon's Law)
3. Support a "medical home" staffing policy in all primary care clinics; insist on continuity of care
4. Screen all FMs for stress (just as we do AD)
5. Don't put up with "fee for service" band-aid medicine
6. Get permission from patients to tell a loved one that they are feeling this way
7. Inform family members about the Traumatic Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)!

Military Suicide Prevention Cultural Change Required



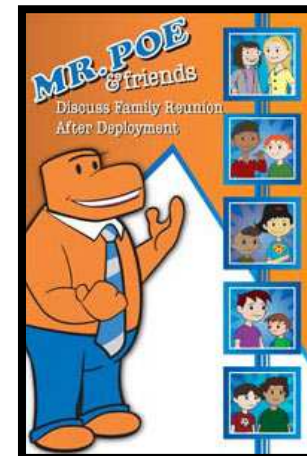
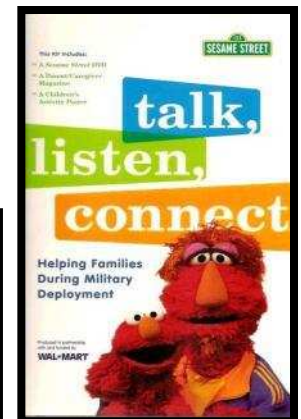
- Treatment:
 - The problem is not really the types of treatment, but the timing of initial actions and follow-up
- Ability to see alternatives is compromised (emotional dysregulation)
- Treatment becomes 'cheaper' with suicide attempt (difficult to find 'free' care when you are sad)
- 44% of those experiencing suicide lie about the cause of death. (None of those dying by accident or natural causes do.) per Joiner p 6

Prevention With Universal Education and Screening Programs



A. Education/ Awareness – 1st 'Visit' (Self) Intervention

- All ages have video program with guide
- Products promote discussion, reassurance, resilience
- Used in the home, on line, or in school (educates community providers)
- Extends care givers, promote appropriate use of community/ mental health resources, improving outcomes



B. Research – Baseline and Monitoring

- AKDQ gives demographics, efficacy
- PSC mental health screen (score >28) establishes baseline, trend over time, proactive, follow-up
- Can collect one data point or trends
- Use pilot platform for other training, evaluation programs (PHA)?

Establish Deployment Monitoring Website(s) Using Video Access & IRB Research Process



U.S. Army Medical Department Center & School - Hurricane Rita Updates - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by ITBC Ft. Sam Ho

https://samhws33/csdev/youth.aspx

U.S. Army Medical Department Center & School - Hurr...

AMEDD

U.S. Army Medical Department
Center & School Portal
A Joint Medical Training Center

Step 3. Demographics and contact data collected for parent and child.

Step 4. Appropriate surveys sent to personal email in-box.

Step 2. Letter invites them to participate (informed consent) - can decline; if "No," straight to **video, Step 7).**

Step 5. Child/Teen Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PSC) baseline done (if participating) prior to viewing video.

Step 6. Answer adult/child/teen survey questions (# 1-12) (if participating) prior to watching video (own-control).

Step 7. **View appropriate video, then answer post-viewing questions (13-18).**

Step 8. Thank them, respond back by email (only if PSC survey positive or request help).

Step 1. Read documents, click on age-appropriate video.



Add Additional Age-Specific Tool(s)



19 to 23 year olds (young adult)
“Address the needs of the young adult in transition!”



- Of 'legal age,' yet a beneficiary.
- Covered by TRICARE only if going to college full-time.
- A history of separation from parent and responsibility for home.
- Dealing with reality of self-support in a distressed economy.
- Overwhelming amount of technological information.

‘Brandon's Law’ Would Help

Speed investigations of missing, endangered persons



- Change “missing person” report response
- Trace cell phone calls, give location to next of kin
- Require immediate intervention, investigation (batteries go dead)
- Disregard "alone time" (when circumstances dictate), direct agencies to work together
- Recommend Federal Law (enacted in 12 states, but not CA & TX)

Suggested Actions To Be Taken (2/3)

Education



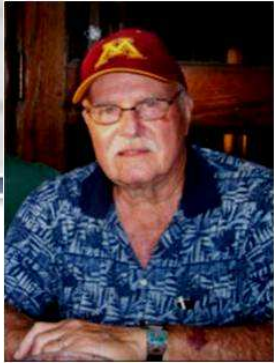
8. Educate family members, and Service Members, about PTSS/ PTSD and suicide (BEFORE it happens), include family in "suicide stand downs" and prevention activities
9. Teach children about suicide, what to watch for, it's OK to tell someone; discuss what impending suicide looks and feels like
10. Rehearse how to call when suicide and depression are apparent to get help with making choices ("permanent solution to a temporary problem").
11. Education on how to react to fellow employees going through grief.
12. Brandon's Law

Suggested Actions To Be Taken (3/3)

Leadership/ Accountability



13. Anyone who had interaction with the patient (and family members) needs to own up to what wasn't done, what could've been done, and discuss it with the surviving family members
14. Whenever a 'cluster' of suicides occurs (more than 3?) investigate
15. Support an honest and transparent search for the facts after a death for both AD and NON-AD Family Member deaths
16. Educate all military leaders on how to deal with suicide issues, encourage getting help (destigmatize), and when a suicide does occur, improve investigations, sharing of facts



“Grandfather (Dad) Wisdom” Coping with Negative Outcomes



- Some decisions turn out badly; but were good at the time
- Did the best we could...back then, but can change for next case...learn from mis-steps...don't repeat same error(s)
- Why didn't we see it coming? Help ourselves, figure out what made it happen, avoid another tragedy, spare others the heart ache
- Know that we are good parents/ caregivers in accepting responsibility to learn from each case
- Help families grieve, look ahead, and keep in touch with remaining children, promote health and well being

Military Suicide Prevention ...from the Survivor's Perspective



Postvention - Keys to being a great colleague, friend

- Don't get tripped up by intellectual lack of understanding
- Make eye contact (don't avoid)
- Be willing to interact (like we are the same person you always knew)
- Say "I'm sorry," and then wait, listen
- It's OK to say, "This topic frightens me, I don't know what to say..." (then just give a hug and let tears go)
- "Push" help, don't make the grieving person ask
- Give some slack for the 1st year (70% is the best one can give when situationally depressed)

Questions?



***“Never let the burden of bureaucracy
fall on the patient’s shoulders.”***

MAJ Steve McCullough, Wounded Warrior



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18 April 1987 to 7 April 2009

Suicide is on people's minds...



The New York Times

U.S.

Fort Hood Struggles With Stressed Troops

6 of 14

SSG Garza and Mom



☒ SIGN IN TO RECOMMEND ☐ TWITTER ☐ SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

Teri Smith with a photo of her son, Staff Sgt. Justin Lee Garza, 28, who committed suicide in a friend's apartment outside Fort Hood. Sergeant Garza was told four days earlier that no therapists were available for a

PFC Parris and Mom

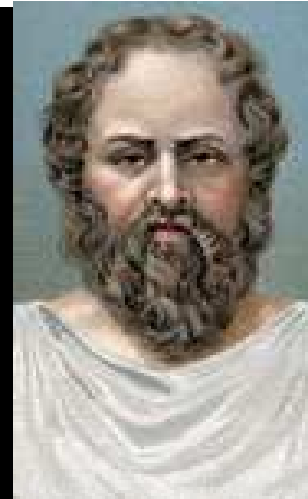


SPC TJ Sweet and Mom

"This is not business as usual.."

GEN Peter W. Chiarelli, VCSA, 27 April 2009

Are We Truly Caring for Our Children?



*"Could I climb the highest place in Athens,
I would lift my voice and proclaim...*

*fellow citizens, why do ye turn and scrape every stone to
gather wealth, and take so little care of your children,
to whom one day you must relinquish it all?"*

Socrates ~400 B.C.



Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
Accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone.
And if lifetime to you is worth savin'
Well you'd better start swimmin'
Or sink like a stone
For the times they are changin'.



The Times They Are Changin'

*by Bob Dylan, sung by James Newton-Howard of Mpls, MN
from "A Whisper in the Noise" and the movie "Lady In the Water"*

Opportunity is waiting in our communities!



Windows of Opportunity



"Seizing opportunity is not always easy. An ancient proverb states that many opportunities are missed because they come disguised as hard work."

Joe M. Sanders, Jr., M.D., AAP Executive Director



HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF.
Opportunity DOESN'T.



**Heed the lessons learned before it's too late!
Understand, identify, and address effects of war on families.**



Come writers and critics
Who prophesize with pen
Keep your eyes wide
The chance won't come again
Don't speak too soon
When the wheel's still in spin
The hour out is rapidly agin'.
And the loser's know
Will be later to learn
'Cuz the times they are changin'.



The Times They Are Changin'

*by Bob Dylan, sung by James Newton-Howard of Mpls, MN
from "A Whisper in the Noise" and the movie "Lady In the Water"*



Life Stress and the Growth of a Child (Maturity, Resiliency, or Premature Adulthood?)

*When I have ceased to break my wings
Against the faultiness of things,
And learned that compromises wait
Behind each hardly opened gate
When I can look life in the eyes,
Grown calm and very coldly wise,
Life will have given me the Truth,
And taken, in exchange - my youth.*



From "Wisdom," Collected Poems by Sara Teasdale 1917

Andrew's 'Truth' claimed his life...



Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the calls
Don't stand in the doorways
Don't block up the halls
For he who gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled



And the battle outside that is ragin'.
It will soon shake your windows
Rattle your walls
For the times they are changin'.

The Times They Are Changin'

*by Bob Dylan, sung by James Newton-Howard of Mpls, MN
from "A Whisper in the Noise" and the movie "Lady In the Water"*



To (really) honor a member of the military for their service and sacrifice, take exceptionally good care of their legacy, their children, while they are away doing the necessary work of the nation.

COL Elisabeth M. Stafford, MD, FAAP



Let's all work together to prevent... the next "Andrew."



Go forth...do good things...